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Alleged Skid Row Dumping Is Captured on Videotape

A patient released from a Kaiser hospital is shown wandering outside a downtown L.A. rescue mission.

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Authorities on Wednesday released a videotape of what they say is the dumping of a 63-year-old patient from Kaiser Permanente's Bellflower hospital in gown and slippers onto the streets of skid row, eliciting an apology from hospital officials.

The videotape, recorded Monday afternoon, shows a taxicab making a U-turn and then driving out of camera view. A few seconds later, Carol Ann Reyes appears from the direction of the cab, wandering for about three minutes in busy San Pedro Street and then on the sidewalk before a Union Rescue Mission staff member escorts her inside the nearby building.

Reyes' movements were recorded by "dumping cams" — pan-tilt security cameras mounted outside the mission's entrance. They were installed last year after the Los Angeles Police Department accused hospitals and other law enforcement agencies of dumping people on the streets of skid row in downtown Los Angeles.

The mission has been sending tapes and written logs of alleged dumping incidents to the Los Angeles city attorney's office.

Reyes of Gardena was released Monday after being a patient at Kaiser Permanente Bellflower Medical Center for three days, the hospital said. Capt. Andrew Smith of the LAPD's Central Division said that he believes the taxi took Reyes to skid row against her will.

Reyes said in an interview that she could not remember what happened when she left the hospital or how she got to skid row.

City Councilwoman Jan Perry, who showed reporters the video at a news conference, called the dumping of the woman "egregious."

"We will not tolerate standing idly by and allow our streets to be the dumping ground for other municipalities and other institutions who choose to deal with people who are homeless and disenfranchised by dumping them in skid row," Perry said.

Diana Bonta, vice president of public affairs for Kaiser Southern California, then stepped up to the microphone.

"I want to apologize to this patient," Bonta said. "Quality of care of patients is not just about taking care of them when they are in the hospital. But part of that is to be able to have a discharge that treats a patient with dignity and assures that their needs are taken care of."

The video, Bonta said, shows a practice that "is not in keeping with the policies of Kaiser Permanente.... We will immediately take action to make sure this never happens again."

Bonta said hospital officials were still looking into the circumstances that led to Reyes' arrival on skid row, including who paid for the taxi. A Kaiser spokesman said that it is not standard practice to release patients from the hospital in gowns and slippers.

A representative from the city attorney's office said that law enforcement authorities were investigating the incident as well.

Andy Bales, president of the Union Rescue Mission, said mission staff members watched as Reyes was let out of the taxi "40 or 50 feet from the front door.... [The driver] didn't get out; [the woman] simply started walking down the street."

"I'm just concerned about a society that would drop its most vulnerable onto the streets of skid row," Bales said. "It really troubles me."

The issue of dumping people on skid row surfaced in September, when Smith publicly complained that outside law-enforcement agencies regularly brought criminals downtown after they had served jail sentences. Smith cited one case in which he saw two sheriff's deputies take a man in handcuffs from their squad car and deposit him on the street.

LAPD officials also have said that they frequently see people with hospital wristbands on skid row, often appearing ill and sometimes wearing colostomy bags.

City officials have said that they are looking into the practice of dumping and examining the underlying issues of why people are brought downtown.

Late last year, the LAPD issued a report naming a handful of hospitals that officials believe had dropped off patients on skid row. Those hospitals — including Kaiser Permanente West Los Angeles — said that they had no other choice when discharging homeless patients who have nowhere else to go and need the services available from the missions and other providers concentrated there.

The city attorney's office has said that it was warning area hospitals that they were the potential targets of an investigation into the practice of dumping patients.

The probe could result in criminal charges or lawsuits if hospitals dumped patients against their will, the office said. That investigation is ongoing.

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